

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Justin Akers Chacón

Interviewer: Katherine Duran

Transcribed by: Katherine Duran

Location: Zoom; narrator based in Chula Vista, CA and interviewer based in La Jolla, CA

Date: May 27, 2022

Length of Interview: 00:51:40

Time	Transcription
00:00:01	Kathy Duran: Alright, so hello, my name is Katherine Duran. Today is May 27, 2022. I'm interviewing Justin Akers Chacón for my Race and Oral History class via recorded Zoom call. I'm currently in La Jolla, do you mind sharing what city you're currently located in for this Zoom call?
00:00:19	Justin A.C.: Chula Vista, California.
00:00:21	Kathy Duran: Oh perfect, Chula Vista. OK, I see, I see it. Okay, so how are you doing today?
00:00:28	Justin A.C.: I'm doing well, thanks. I just finished my semester and beginning my summer.
00:00:34	Kathy Duran: Perfect I'm glad to hear that. So to start off, do you mind introducing yourself a bit?
00:00:40	Justin A.C.: Sure, I'm Justin Akers Chacón. I'm 50 years old, I am a professor of Chicana/Chicano studies at San Diego City College and I'm an author and an activist, based in Chula Vista, California.
00:01:00	Kathy Duran: Perfect and can you tell us where you're actually from, like your hometown.
00:01:07	Justin A.C.: My hometown is Ventura, California, which is in Ventura county, the county just north of Los Angeles.
00:01:15	Kathy Duran: Perfect, so I'm actually really interested in learning more about your upbringing in Ventura if you don't mind.
00:01:22	Justin A.C.: Sure, so both of my parents' families migrated to Ventura in the early part of the 20th century. My mother's family migrated, I should say my great

Time	Transcription
	grandparents on my mother's side, migrated from Michoacan, Mexico during the period of the Mexican revolution and arrived in Ventura in about...
00:01:54	Justin A.C.: Let's see... 19... about 1913, and they settled in Ventura and they became incorporated into the society as it existed at the time, which was one that was racially segregated
00:02:16	Justin A.C.: and one where Mexican migrants into the area typically were absorbed into the agricultural economy.
00:02:23	Justin A.C.: So my great-great grandfather was a ranch hand on a rancho and my great grandmother, his daughter, was a packing- a citrus packer for 50 years at three different citrus packing plants because Ventura was part of what's called the Citrus Corridor where a lot of the agricultural economy was lemons, orange and lemon production.
00:02:59	Justin A.C.: My father's family came to Ventura, they were a part of the last wave of what are referred to, historically, as the Okie migration, people from Oklahoma and Kansas. My father and his family are originally from Oklahoma and then they lived on the Oklahoma Kansas border inside Kansas, a place called Arkansas City and my father's grandfather migrated to California in the earlier part of the 20th century, and then his grandkids, his son and his grandson, my father and grandfather both came at different points after
00:03:35	Justin A.C.: And so they settled into Ventura and they lived in proximity to each other because the Mexican barrio in Ventura was... Geographically it was the only place where Okie migrants, who were also sort of treated as outsiders, lived in the periphery of the Mexican barrio and so that's- [inaudible]
00:04:06	Justin A.C.: My father's mother and my mother's mother became friends and then [laughs] yeah and then that's how my family history began, but I grew up primarily with my mother's family.
00:04:19	Justin A.C.: You know, with my parents, but more associated and living within the Mexican community. And I went to school at a... Catholic school that was attached to one of the Spanish missions, the mission of San Buenaventura.
00:04:37	Justin A.C.: And I went to the same school that my grandmother went to, my mother, my aunts and uncles went to, and so I was the third generation going to that school.
00:04:47	Justin A.C.: And it was in proximity to where my great-great grandfather and great-great grandmother from Mexico worked in agriculture.
00:04:56	Justin A.C.: So there's, a lot of the history, and a lot of my early history is located in what is, what, you know, by the time I was a child, would be desegregated or theoretically desegregated Mexican barrio. And then I went to high school, at a Catholic high school in Ventura as well.

Time	Transcription
00:05:16	Justin A.C.: But I grew up, yeah, I grew up very, very close to my, the Chacón side of my family and left Ventura when I was 17. I got to go to college.
00:05:33	Kathy Duran: Wow that's like really interesting to hear, especially like I'm a first generation American. So, like being able to hear like Mexican history like being here for like generations and stuff like is always so interesting to me. Yeah I feel like people try to make it seem like we haven't been here like, [making it seem like] every Mexican is just like coming from immigrant families.
00:05:55	Kathy Duran: But like we have, we've been here like generating and all of that stuff um so yeah that's really special for me to hear. Could you describe to me what activism has looked like in your life from like when you started getting involved with the movement until now?
00:06:12	Justin A.C.: Okay yeah so. I would say, you know my activism was very much influenced by my experiences as a youth.
00:06:24	Justin A.C.: Especially coming from a working class, you know, low-income family, where we had a lot of challenges.
00:06:32	Justin A.C.: And you know, economically, of course, also growing up in and around the Mexican community and experiencing and but seeing directly in many different forms the way racism shapes the lives of people in the community that I grew up in and you know feeling,
00:06:58	Justin A.C.: You know, being very, very conscious of the role that racism, you know, plays in our society in terms of maintaining and reinforcing social inequalities.
00:07:08	Justin A.C.: But my transition to an activist, I think, happened in phases. One was during the first Gulf War in 1991-92, where I became aware and became critical of US military involvement, in this case in Iraq, and how it set me on a kind of trajectory towards being critical of the way the US. government operates in other parts of the world.
00:07:42	Justin A.C.: Another factor was the election of 1992 where Bill Clinton, then Democrat Bill Clinton was running for President. One of his campaign promises was universal health care, and at that time I didn't have health care, and that was something that politicized me, the idea of having health care, or at least raising the issue of why people don't have health care, and that we could have health care.
00:08:17	Justin A.C.: So those things were you know some of the markers I guess where my turn, you know, towards seeing the need to be part of something, to effect change, and you know I would say that I really became an activist integrated into social movements starting at around 1994-1995 and you know some of the issues that were activated around had to do with Operation Gatekeeper and the building up of the military border wall.

Time	Transcription
00:08:51	Justin A.C.: And other issues, you know, basically centered around anti-racist activism, and understanding a recognition of class inequalities and seeing the need to be a part of a struggle to, you know, again effect change that will positively impact working class people.
00:09:20	Kathy Duran: Yeah um I can hear a lot that you like center working class people in a lot of your work, a lot of like the meetings that I looked at before the interview, and it also sounds like you came from like very much a working-class community.
00:09:36	Kathy Duran: Do you think, you could talk a little bit more about like working class communities and like what how you found that they're like involved in like leftism?
00:09:48	Justin A.C.: Yeah so I've been working since I was 15. I've worked every year since, so in my family, you know, what I observed growing up was that people work in different types of jobs and that there was always some kind of struggle to make ends meet. So my class consciousness was shaped at a very young age, but I also lived and, you know, experienced seeing the different ways in which class oppression was, you know, it was sort of imposed and the way it was experienced.
00:10:31	Justin A.C.: And I became conscious of racial class oppression, you know, starting with my own family and in the community, that I lived in so by the time I left my home, essentially, and moved to another city,
00:10:52	Justin A.C.: I was already working for a couple years and had to work to survive and, you know, just through the experiences of being a worker at a young age and seeing and observing the way class oppression express themselves, you know, it really shaped me, it really shaped how I understood myself, my family, in relationship to society as a whole.
00:11:17	Justin A.C.: And then you know, seeing specifically, especially after I moved down to San Diego, or San Diego County, and being an activist around the issue of immigration and the border, seeing firsthand and also learning both personally but also academically, studying the way in which the class structure was formed here in the United States
00:11:55	Justin A.C.: by creating and by essentially structuring the working class that has different racial and national characteristics and denying a full citizenship rights to people who are immigrants or from from south of the US Mexico border.
00:12:05	Justin A.C.: And the way in which that actually becomes, has become a part of how the capitalist system works right is by using racial, national, and other forms of oppression in order to keep people under conditions in which their labor can be more exploited.
00:12:24	Justin A.C.: So that class framework, I would say, it's probably, you know, shaped by my own experience, but also seeing as an activist and an academic how it's not incidental or a byproduct of how the system operates but it's actually a function.

Time	Transcription
00:12:44	Justin A.C.: And that's, you know, that's reinforced in all these different ways. So yeah, class is a central sort of way for me to understand how can, you know, the sort of divide, the social inequality and whatnot but, but specifically the way racism and other forms of oppression intersect.
00:13:05	Justin A.C.: And how those are leveraged to oppress and exploit and so yeah. One more thing I would add to that, though, is I've also, you know, more as an activist than through my own experience as a young worker.
00:13:25	Justin A.C.: I've seen the way working class people resist and can, under conditions in which they can be organized, in which they're organized and fight back against oppression. I've seen in many different ways the power that working class people can develop and wield and to me that probably is the single, singular, singularly most important aspect of my analysis is how ordinary working-class people can change the conditions of their oppression and exploitation through resistance and struggle.
00:14:05	Kathy Duran: Yeah and I think that's really revolutionary for me to hear and least, especially as someone who is also like in academia.
00:14:14	Kathy Duran: Because yeah I think sometimes like academia likes to act like working class people like aren't able to empower themselves and like be part of that resistance, but like you said, like it's really ingrained in our history, our culture, so I think I really appreciate you like, highlighting that.
00:14:33	Kathy Duran: And really it was something that I really liked have been internalizing since I was like researching your work.
00:14:39	Kathy Duran: But yeah moving a little bit into border resistance I wanted to know what are some ways that you're currently engaged with like border resistance here in San Diego both in and outside of your academic position.
00:14:54	Justin A.C.: Okay. So outside of my academic position I've been primarily involved like, the primary place of involvement is in detention abolition. So, starting in around 2017-2018, I was organizing as part of a larger collective of activists to organize events to call attention to what was happening at that time with the mass incarceration of migrants and refugees happening under the changed the rules of border enforcement under Trump.
00:15:44	Justin A.C.: And so I was organizing, we were organizing and doing events like protests and rallies to call attention to what was actually happening on the border with the creation of kind of like open air concentration camps and packing people into the border patrol stations and really just a barbaric and completely inhumane sort of treatment of people in you know seeking sanctuary and seeking safety.
00:16:16	Justin A.C.: And you know so being part, trying to be part of a movement to protest and pose those policies and then that led me to continue to work, specifically with a group of activists Otay Mesa Detention Resistance, which is an

Time	Transcription
	organizing collective that does work inside a specific detention center here in San Diego County called the Course Civic Otay Mesa Detention Center.
00:16:51	Justin A.C.: So they did work supporting people from the inside to supporting actions against the institution and its oppressive operations from the outside. And so through that work what's called the FreeTheAll coalition and the primary objective of that group now, in its second or third year, is to close the Course Civic Otay Mesa Detention Center,
00:17:24	Justin A.C.: Which is a for-profit entity, which basically profits off the oppression and the misery and the suffering of migrants and refugee people who are detained there, so we combine a kind of strategy of, an organizing strategy that tries to involve larger numbers of people in protest action, but also through other sort of strategies and tactics to basically put pressure on
00:18:00	Justin A.C.: The governing structure to see the need to shut it down and to stop detaining people. And you know, our goal is abolition, which is, we are committed to the idea that the apparatus of migrant refugee repression, which is now immense, and it's been growing for some time, which functions as a profit-making enterprise, but also, you know, a racist and xenophobic form of punishing people in many cases where this place from policies emanating from the country
00:18:48	Justin A.C.: So yeah we see that these institutions are inherently oppressive and violent and there's no room for them and so drawing from the abolitionist concept of freedom and liberation for people who are oppressed under these circumstances, we see the need to absolutely close these institutions and completely transform, you know, a system that basically makes it profitable to harm others.
00:19:22	Kathy Duran: Yeah I definitely hear you, I also identify as an abolitionist and I think that... yeah I think it can kind of be hard sometimes to get through to people about abolition, so can you maybe talk about like what that's been like with you, for you, maybe working with, even like working class people who like aren't behind abolition yet.
00:19:50	Justin A.C.: Right, well, I mean we live in a society, I think, a very reformed society that uses politics and economics, in a way in which, you know, historically oppression is a way of doing business. And you know, and so, for me personally, like I've developed, you know, having been part of border abolition, and you know even before there was really, you know, at least before I had a name for it.
00:20:25	Justin A.C.: It was very much framed by seeing firsthand what the impacts of these repressive systems, you know, what happens, what kind of harm and devastation they inflict, like people dying across the border, people dying, you know, at the hands of border agents, people suffering or languishing in these camps, or so-called detention centers.
00:20:54	Justin A.C.: So yeah, but they're very normalized, you know, policing and repression is very much normalized as a way that our society operates, from the

Time	Transcription
	police policing people in communities, especially Black and brown working-class communities to, you know, the militarization, the scale of militarization in U.S. society and the military itself, which is engaged in wars or actions around the world.
00:21:26	Justin A.C.: I mean this is so normalized that violence and repression and militarization is, it's just, it's ubiquitous, it's all around us. So yeah, there has to be a way of sort of seeing the functionality of these repressive institutions, not just as something that's normal but something that actually has another purpose, and that purpose can be identified and that purpose can be to be criticized right.
00:21:59	Justin A.C.: So yeah, having an analysis, a theoretical understanding of how these institutions actually function, to me, creates what their purpose actually are, as opposed to "what we're told", such as keeping us safe or protecting us, you know, from external threats. I mean that to me, if you can have that conversation with people, you can, you know, it can be seen, it can be understood, especially by people who live with the consequences of it.
00:22:31	Justin A.C.: But yeah, but we're constantly bombarded with different impulses that just make it seem like it's normal. So for me understanding the way border enforcement and the repression of migrants and refugees ultimately becomes integrated into how a larger economic system works.
00:22:56	Justin A.C.: An economic system that inherently harms working class, you know, most people in our society, and being able to make the parallels between the repression of migrants and refugee people, who primarily are workers and how that repression, doesn't stop, or it's not designed to stop or change migration, or prevent people from coming to the United States. What it does is actually disqualifies them as citizens, you know, and either profits off them as workers who can, whose labor can be degraded and devalued.
00:23:37	Justin A.C.: Or profits off them secondarily through incarceration or to be fodder for the narrative that we have to, you know, protect our borders and we have to do all these things that essentially are ways for people to make money off of misery.
00:23:54	Justin A.C.: So yeah, being able to develop a framework to understand what its real purpose is, to dispel the myths and lies about what justifies it, I think people can understand that, but it's very difficult to reach a larger audience, because in our society, the political economy of this, you know, the sort of political side of this economy is one that.
00:24:22	Justin A.C.: Constantly reinforces it and we don't have an alternative in our political system. We don't have, you know, in this case, political parties that essentially, or any political party or political voice that's invested into the system as it is.
00:24:41	Justin A.C.: So they will not address the contradictions, will not address the violence or repression and ultimately the discourse becomes shaped, it becomes

Time	Transcription
	<p>very, very rhetorically different but, in practice, the political parties work almost identically. And so under these circumstances, you know, it does create a disconnect between people's real life experiences and understanding of the system and, you know, through their own lived experiences and what they're told, and how they're made to think that there could be no alternative.</p>
00:25:23	<p>Kathy Duran: Yeah I think that was a really good explanation that like even has like really got me thinking. Even just like within current events right, like gun control and all of that, and like thinking about like why sometimes people that are oppressed continue to have these beliefs. I think it's important to bring in theory and praxis, I feel like is what you're talking about, like where they meet in the middle.</p>
00:25:47	<p>Kathy Duran: Like using theory to like help people process like what they're already experiencing. So yeah I think that's like a really important point that you made.</p>
00:25:58	<p>Kathy Duran: I wanted to ask if you could maybe describe like one impactful moment that you experienced throughout your role as an activist, maybe, like one moment that really impacted you, that you really remember, that shaped how you do the rest of your activism.</p>
00:26:14	<p>Justin A.C.: Yeah so one that comes to mind, you know at the forefront of me reflecting on this, is participating in, you know, what's been referred to as the Gran Marcha, or the "day without an immigrant" protest that took place in 2006. The one specifically, because there were several, you know, different protests around the country the first few months of that year, but March, I think it was March 25 in Los Angeles, 2006, there were like between 1 million and a million and a half, almost... maybe even 2 million, I don't know, but somewhere between one and two million people, that took over downtown Los Angeles, as part of the protest against criminalization of migrants and refugee peoples in this country.</p>
00:27:13	<p>Justin A.C.: And I've never been, I had never been part of something so large, and it was a combination of a walkout, boycott, workers going on strike, and then the coalescing of people coming together, you know, in a mass to oppose specifically a bill that was proposed in Congress at that time, Sensenbrenner King bill.</p>
00:27:40	<p>Justin A.C.: HR 4437 which would have made it a felony to be undocumented in the United States. It was the high point of that wave, at that time, of criminalization and it was killed, the bill was killed by, you know, millions of people coming out collectively.</p>
00:27:58	<p>Justin A.C.: But I remember being part of that mass movement of people and feeling very, very empowered. Feeling like, you know, visually feeling like this was a large section of the class in motion, the front of the working class, you know, which I believe immigrant and migrant and refugee workers at that time were.</p>

Time	Transcription
00:28:28	Justin A.C.: I see that as part of the class struggle and then seeing it coalesce after various types of action, dissident action against the State. And then another thing that that struck me is that there were so many people together in solidarity that there were no, the police basically stayed in their in their departments, they never came out.
00:28:58	Justin A.C.: There was no police on the streets, that I could see, that whole day and I thought it was wonderful. I thought it was amazing and it made me realize that, it made me realize like we have power, collective power and that that power is stronger than any kind of repressive aspect of the state to the point where police were, you know, they were just completely pointless. And so these kinds of things stuck with me and continued to inform, you know, how I see the potential for transformation in society.
00:29:35	Kathy Duran: Yeah that sounds really powerful and I think that, like I think that it's probably important as an activist like to have moments like that because it gets a little bleak out here. Like I know that me especially like whenever, like all my identities are compounding and I'm like currently experiencing a lot of those things, like it gets really easy for me to be like "Wow like we just really don't have power like it just really is what it is." Do you think you could talk a little bit about like, how for you, being in activism for so long now, like how you've been able to like maintain your passion and like not lose hope?
00:30:13	Justin A.C.: Yeah that's a good, important question. I think there's a couple ways I would answer that. One is that seeing the potential, and living through the potential, where I can see how transformation could actually happen. I mean I think in, most recently in 2020, the rebellion inspired by the opposition to police brutality after the killing of George Floyd. I think, you know, I was also, took part in the protests, in action, as much as I could.
00:30:47	Justin A.C.: I felt, you know, like in 2006 I felt seeing this collective power demonstrated by millions of people who understood that the source of the problem and the state, you know, represented by the police, but also all of the layers of the repressive apparatus, you know from the least to the legal, you know, the criminal justice system, the courts, et cetera. And you know, again, those kinds of experiences they leave an indelible mark.
00:31:21	Justin A.C.: If you have an analysis and an understanding of the need for change or abolition, you know, or some kind of transformation living through these, you know, what I would characterize as mass uprisings, our demonstrations of our capacity. And I've been an activist since, you know, I've been involved in social movements since the mid-90s, and I can actually see there's ebbs and flows up and down and see an incline.
00:31:58	Justin A.C.: I can see that things are getting, you know, that social movements are learning, they're becoming more expansive and inclusive and, you know, the factors of this political and economic system are compelling more and more people to learn how to struggle, you know. And that informs what keeps me going. But I also have lived through many downs and I've seen how things can, you know, can

Time	Transcription
	collapse when there's repression, you know, like there was against, and has been consistently, against migrant and refugee and undocumented communities.
00:32:36	Justin A.C.: The level of state repression, it done great damage to these communities after, especially after the uprising, you know, the mass movements of 2006. I've seen, you know, a lot of demoralization, defeat when change isn't won. And so I'm not impervious to that, but I've grounded myself in study, not just as an academic exercise, although that's part of it, but a study of a system, the study of, you know, social movements of the past.
00:33:16	Justin A.C.: You know, try to constantly ground the theory that helps me understand, be grounded in a theory that helps me understand that struggle, that's essentially the character of struggle, is that it goes back and forth, it's up and down.
00:33:32	Justin A.C.: But there is a learning process, there is, and there are crisis points that are getting deeper in our society.
00:33:41	Justin A.C.: And there's also a shift, a qualitative shift, towards a type of barbarism in our society, you know, what I would characterize as a type of barbarism, where in many different aspects of the way the system operates, its destroying things, it's destroying people.
00:34:02	Justin A.C.: And, and so there's also that kind of urgency that like, it's not just an exercise in like being an activist. It's an understanding that we're struggling for a type of liberation, but we're also working against the system that is trying to kill us.
00:34:21	Justin A.C.: That is literally, you know, and people, I say people, within that system driving it to a point where it's becoming so destructive, environmentally, on the basis of basic human rights, the reemergence of political forces of the far extreme and fascist right that, you know, are anti-human in their own way. These different characteristics, I think, also sort of ground me in an understanding of what we do now matters and through the ups and downs, you know, essentially if you understand that, then you commit yourself to that. And you commit yourself to building, trying to bring as many people with you into the process of social movements and social transformation.
00:35:12	Kathy Duran: Yeah, thank you for that. I think that, yeah I feel like as someone who's trying to grow in activism and stuff like this really got me thinking, really got me feeling less, less dreadful about things. But, like, I know that we've been kind of talking around you like identifying as a radical, so I wanted to give you the opportunity to like directly define like what it means for you to identify as a radical.
00:35:40	Justin A.C.: Yes, so I guess I would start by grounding myself in the theory of Marxism. You know, for me that has been the clearest way of understanding how capital, the system of capitalism operates.

Time	Transcription
00:36:00	Justin A.C.: And also... Not just having the critique of capitalism but having an orientation towards ending it [laughs]. I mean, to put it bluntly. And so, as a historian, and I draw from other theoretical frameworks and thinkers as well.
00:36:25	Justin A.C.: But I situate my own sense of identity as a radical as being an anti-capitalist, right, because through all my experiences, through all my learning, through all my observations, at the point of theory and practice coming together.
00:36:47	Justin A.C.: All of, you know, the totality of my understanding leads back to the idea that we have a system that is fundamentally flawed and designed to allocate privilege and power in the hands of the few, misery and poverty, you know, for the rest of us.
00:37:09	Justin A.C.: And then I also can locate the way oppression, racial, gender, national, all of these other forms of oppression, how they intersect through the class system and reinforce, you know, and widen and deepen class inequality. So yeah, so radical for me means that we can't accommodate to a system that oppresses us, we can't change the oppressor, no matter how progressive or regressive, you know, they present themselves.
00:37:52	Justin A.C.: You know, that the political parties themselves are an extension of the, you know, of the class system, of the system [inaudible] economy allocates power and how power reinforces the system as a whole.
00:38:10	Justin A.C.: So yeah, at the end of the day, radical means change at the root and so for me we fight, we fight, I struggle on behalf of improving the conditions of life for all people, opposing all forms of oppression, but always linking that to an understanding that we can't change the nature of the system that is oppressing us, we have to change the system itself.
00:38:38	Justin A.C.: And that can be small like, you know, one project that I'm working on with my <i>colegas</i> (colleagues) and my <i>compass</i> (friends) on the college level is to build a campaign to defund the police because we at our community college district
00:39:03	Justin A.C.: We have our own police force, right, and it sucks millions and millions of dollars away from our classrooms, from our students, and we live in a constant state of defunding, the state defunding our education and police getting more and more funds.
00:39:21	Justin A.C.: So for me transformative, transformation on that level is struggling to reallocate those funds away from policing towards our student's needs.
00:39:32	Justin A.C.: And then yeah, my writing and activism around the border is geared towards the idea that we're never going to have quality or freedom or even peace or justice in our communities as long as the <i>migra</i> (Border Patrol), as long as concentration camps, as long as, you know, a white supremacist settler colonial culture dominates, dominates the sort of the sort of order region and informs how

Time	Transcription
	racist views are cultivated against people who were crossing into, from one from one side of the border to the other.
00:40:17	Justin A.C.: Even if people have been doing that for thousands of years before the settlers even came, you know, so these kinds of these kinds of radical politics are always at the core of how I try to organize and how I try to communicate how we make change.
00:40:34	Kathy Duran: Yeah I know that you were talking like a little bit about within the community college space and the police there so, and I know that obviously the community colleges are under the institution, right.
00:40:49	Kathy Duran: So how is it like for you to be a radical within institution, within the academic space, in terms of like do you feel like you can't say certain things, do you feel like retaliation, anything like that?
00:41:05	Justin A.C.: Hmm well. The larger question of what's it like working in, you know, within an institution. I think they're inherently, you know, as part of my analysis, I would say the education system is part of the political economy of capitalism so they're not sort of independent institutions that are completely shaped by the actions of those that work within it.
00:41:32	Justin A.C.: Their very structure is very top-down from the state, you know, to the district, to the administration. So yeah, there's an inherent conservatism and a dominant politics that's shaped from that top-down structure and currently at the state level there has been, I would say, well currently but also going back for some time, there has been a desire to restructure public education
00:42:07	Justin A.C.: Higher public education, you know, along neoliberal capitalist lines, which basically amounts to gradually, incrementally decreasing the amount of funding for students and privatizing, you know, more and more aspects of how the institution has to be privatized. And so a lot of the decisions that we would like to affect happen long before we can have a chance to act on them, and we do have a union and we do have an academic senate and the union...
00:42:45	Justin A.C.: Well, let me just say that there has, you know, there are efforts made to the bodies to mitigate or oppose or transform or stop this sort of regressive transformation, defunding and whatnot. But, for the most part, for the most part, you know the top-down sort of character and nature of these institutions and the way that it's informed at the top by trends towards a neoliberal privatization and whatnot makes it very difficult, makes it challenging, you know, to affect anything at that level, but we do, we do organize.
00:43:24	Justin A.C.: And there are a lot of people, you know, there are a lot of people that work within the institution that are, you know, they're fine with it. I mean some of the most vocal people, you know, are actually kind of champions of this process. But I would say that there's a lot more people who are, you know, who are cognizant and aware

Time	Transcription
00:43:50	Justin A.C.: That much of the policy framework that's been implemented over the last decade, at least, has not been beneficial to our students. But, you know, there's a much larger population of people that just generally follow along and
00:44:06	Justin A.C.: You know, we try to organize in those spaces and sometimes we have success, but I would say primarily success in defending as opposed to having the ability to, you know, to sort of change the institution itself.
00:44:21	Justin A.C.: And, you know, but we do what we can. And I would just say the other thing has been, I think the even greater force or change in these inherently conservative top-down institutions, you know, that sort of reflects the will of people that have much bigger impact on things because of their class position, their wealth, you know, the private sector, etc., the people who really, I think, drive politics state level through the elected officials and political parties.
00:44:57	Justin A.C.: I think its students and I think there has been, where I work, for instance there's been very impressive social movements that have opposed budget cuts, that have stood with the people protesting for Black Lives Matter. Going back for immigrant rights, I mean students, the thing about where I teach, the institution I'm at, the community we serve, is that these are the affected communities.
00:45:32	Justin A.C.: So when they're on campus, they're not living in a bubble, you know, the campus is situated much more in proximity to their communities and what they experience inside the campus. They bring that with them, and vice versa.
00:45:54	Justin A.C.: So yeah so there there's much more of a working-class population who are affected by the different forms of class oppression and class inequality. So yeah, the student movements have been very vibrant and I think a real, you know, positive force since I've been a teacher.
00:46:18	Kathy Duran: Yeah I'm really glad to hear that that's happening there, especially as someone who's like from San Diego and like went to high school in San Diego and the way that schools scare you about community college and stuff and basically scaring you from being with the people in your community. So it's like really cool to hear like what's going on over there.
00:46:38	Kathy Duran: Just to finish off our interview, I wanted to you know get a chance to get your expertise on maybe what are some of the best ways, in your opinion, that people with no organizing and activism experience can get involved and contribute to the cause, maybe specifically like within San Diego.
00:46:58	Justin A.C.: Yeah well I think that's a great question, I mean, I think there's no alternative to finding organizations that are doing work, activist work, organizing work and where that doesn't exist, building something.
00:47:18	Justin A.C.: You know, organizing a meeting, putting up flyers, sending out social media posts, you know, trying to bring like-minded people together. You know, I

Time	Transcription
	think, to periodize, to use a historian's conception, I think we're in a period of time where people are being politicized in ways I haven't seen in my life.
00:47:47	Justin A.C.: You know, especially younger people, but I would extend it to the whole population, I think there's a lot of factors that are driving that politicization.
00:48:01	Justin A.C.: That leads people, you know, look for other ways to make sense and other ways to address what is otherwise not being addressed. I mean that was my experience in the 90s, but under very different circumstances where, you know, you had to really, really search out for something for people who are trying to do things beyond the norm and, more specifically, you know doing public education, doing organizing, doing community events, you know, to educate and organize people. Much less common.
00:48:39	Justin A.C.: I think today, I think more and more people are being politicized and being pushed to think beyond, not accepting, you know, just the sort of, the world as it's being presented to them in whichever way but believing there's something more, something and something that could be done.
00:48:59	Justin A.C.: But there's no alternative, you know, to getting organized, to engaging in the study of critical theory, but not just for its own sake, but for the sake of informing, you know, how we can make sense out of systems so that we can understand them so that we can change them. And so, how we can, how we can learn from our elders and our ancestors and then those who came before you know who have struggled, you know, who have affected change, you know those kinds of things.
00:49:29	Justin A.C.: So I think I think the both conditions are, you know, are possible right now. One is finding, well I should say three things, that a larger population of people who are looking. An understanding that there are organizations doing this kind of work that can be found and where not, to create them. And I think, you know, through social media, I don't think it's a substitute for actual organizing on the ground, I do think it's a great tool and I think people can use that to find each other.
00:50:06	Justin A.C.: But yeah that would be my suggestion or my analysis of that.
00:50:14	Kathy Duran: Yeah I think that's a great answer. I think that, definitely I didn't stop to think that, I think like being a person that is experiencing this era, right now, like, for the first time with like no other history behind like I think sometimes I get a little critical and stuff, not realizing that really like yeah, it's an evolution of the tools that we have around us.
00:50:36	Kathy Duran: So yeah I think that was a great answer but yeah that was the last question I had. Did you want to add any closing comments before I stop the recording of this interview?
00:50:48	Justin A.C.: No, well, I guess, just to say thank you for doing this. I mean I appreciate your perspectives and what you brought on to the discussion as well

Time	Transcription
	and I'm glad you know, I'm just, I'm glad you're doing this project, and I do think you know part of working towards transformative justice, you know, it requires that we talk to each other and learn from each other.
00:51:14	Justin A.C.: And figure out ways to work together towards common cause.
00:51:19	Kathy Duran: Yeah I think so, too. I think, honestly, like I've learned a lot today and I feel like pretty changed, especially after like really undergoing these last two years of COVID and like all of that. Yeah I think it's like, I think it's reminding me that, like really, just go talk to someone girl like, you know? But yeah, I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording right now.